Music

Finally, a Night of Live Music in London That Doesn't Suck

By Ryan Bassil

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Slotted a brisk walk away from a chicken shop and a little further from Stockwell station, The Queen's Head blends into its surroundings like a brush stroke on a

beat-artist's imagining of down-and-out London. "Do you have ID, lads?", asks the bouncer situated just outside the South London boozer. "Nah, they're alright. Let them in," replies Saul, the dusty gap-toothed guitarist for Fat White Family, who is assumedly playing adopted landlord.

This looks like the sort of place where you'd be laughed out for suggesting a pub quiz, let-alone a live gig featuring some of the Capital's best new talent. Yet I'm here for Slide-In, the Fat White's night, which they've been playing at since as far back as 2011 when it was hosted at The Tulse Hill Tavern. On the bill tonight are Jerkcurb, Childhood, King Krule, and the hosts. It's a fiver to get in ("free if you're on the dole") and the capacity holds 150. Oh, and there's free whisky, apparently. Although when I arrive it's all gone.

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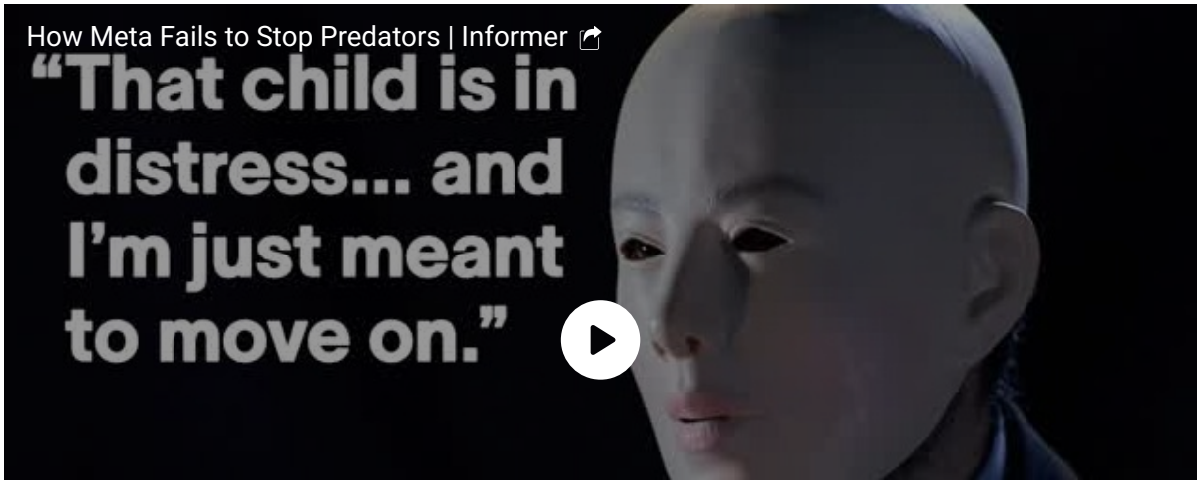
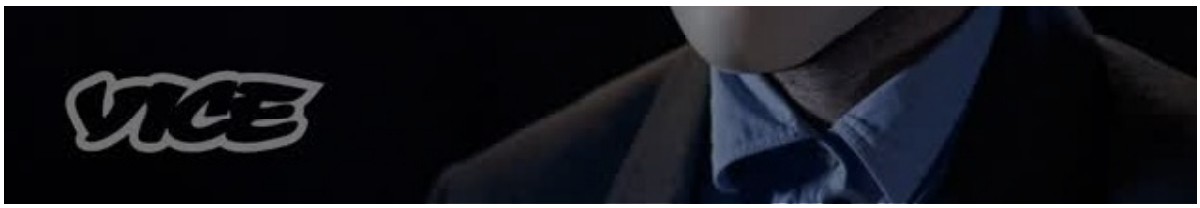
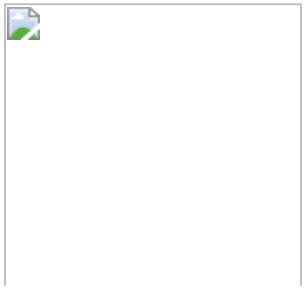




The Queens Head is the Fat White Family's base. A red and yellow background splayed with the band's name adorns the pub's interior. They rehearse here, sleep here when homeless, pull the odd shift behind the bar, and tonight, they're putting on the most affordable night in London. Inside, The Who's "Can't Explain" and "Baba O'Riley" blast out of a stereo while King Krule soundchecks.

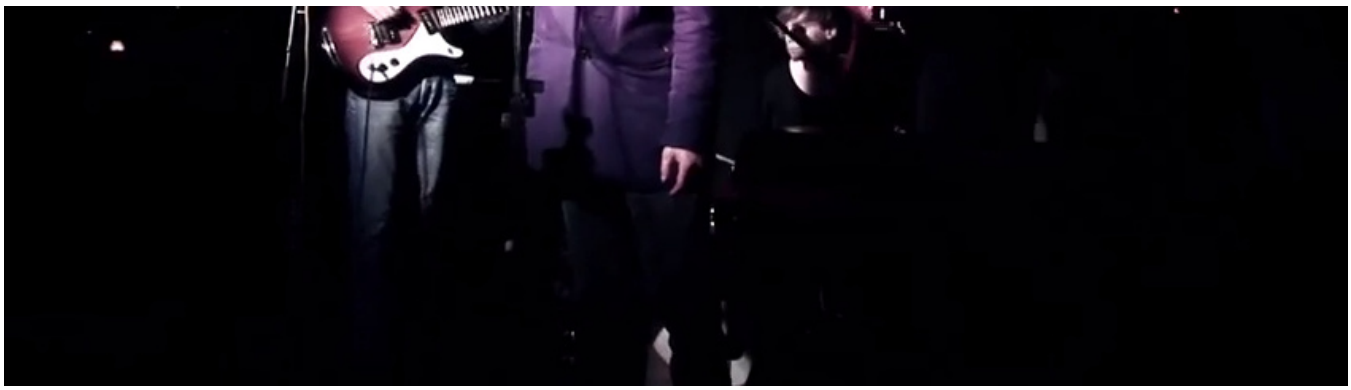


If this was a publicly advertised, See-Ticketed King Krule gig, the venue would be rammed with industry types. But when I arrive it's half empty, people marinating over conversations far from the industry hype-chatter that usually surrounds such exclusivity. The patronage both on-stage and off is the same, egoless people who are all loosely connected, girls that have imported their sartorial ensembles from the Instagram of a retro-chic street-style blog, Burton-boy salariats, genuine and Gossip Girl gyaldem and Jubilee Line stoners are all

here to have a good time. Here, boundaries do not matter, there's no crash-barrier separation between pedestal and paying guests.

The best example of this variety comes from Tim, a gnarled middle-age man with the bottom chin of a Viz cartoon, who repeatedly invades our personal space like a drunken commuter riding a suburban rail service at 10:30pm on a Thursday.

"We're talking about Mila Kunis", I tell him. "Who's that then?", he replies. He's wearing a shirt, is in his 40s, and asks us if I've ever heard of a band called Metallica, Iron Maiden, or Megadeth. He calls them the Grand Nation. Tim isn't sure who King Krule is, but if it's who he thinks, then "he's a diamond geezer." Later, he produces a bag of a legal-high called Critical Haze. It smells like hot chocolate. I roll a joint for him in return and after three draws he's in a deep mental conundrum. I shuffle off.



(*The Old Man, via*)

Inside, a grey-haired old man, who is the on-stage host at the Slide-In events, introduces the first act. “It’s Slide-In and it’s anathaaaa Saturday night, we’re going to party, so are you, let’s get fucking ready and kick it off with Jerkcuuuuuuuuuuuuuurb”.

Jerkcurb, it transpires, create an orgy of guitars that twist around each other like a bunch of casually involved nymphomaniacs. It’s obvious he spent time playing in Krule’s band. I fall in love with the girl next to me five times.

Afterwards, I catch up with King Krule, Archy Marshall to his dentist. I ask him about the South London scene, Jerkcurb, Rago Foot, Jesse James, and a whole bunch of others who are all in attendance this evening. Characteristically nonchalant, he tells me to check out Thidius Risk, and then I leave before it gets

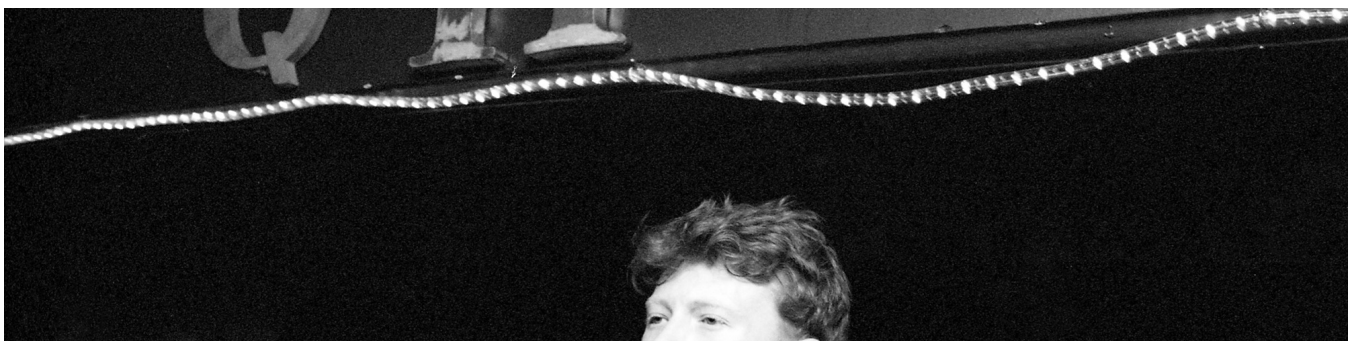
awk.

(via)

The grey-haired man appears on stage again. “Yeah! We’re getting ready for Round 2. Hey, take me back to my Childhood!” and for the next half an hour we’re treated to a sound that tastes like blue coloured 20p Mr. Freeze popsicles and going to the bench after school. The E-number fuel ignites the limbs of the teenagers congregating round the front.

(via)

Childhood finish, and I realise that we've now left Tim, our adopted forty-year old friend, alone for almost an hour. When I go back outside, I find him passed out. Because I'm a horrible person, I take a selfie. This will be shown to no one, for the sake of both of our dignities. The bands tonight shun noveau-traditional forms of social interaction, proving that IRL spontaneity and interaction breed good times.

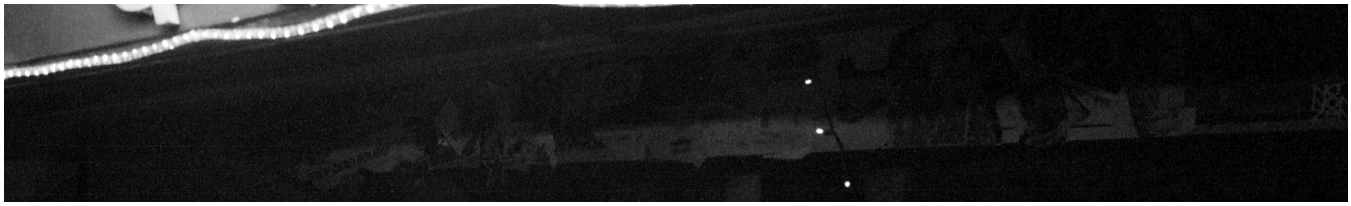


A great example of this is King Krule, who are now on-stage. “This is a new song. We’ve never played it before and we don’t really know how it goes”, Archy says.

This new song then extends itself into a long-jam.

The jazzier set-list, featuring the new song, a loosely jammed version of “Baby Blue” plus “The Crocodile”, and “Lizard State”, alongside other recently aired newbie “La Luna”, hints at a new sound that will branch further away from the barren echoes of “Out Getting Ribs”, the first Marshall track to get big when he was still called Zoo Kid. They end with “Easy Easy”, which is cut slightly short

after Archy delves into the crowd, creating the biggest surge forward, displacing half of us onto the stage. “KING KRULE, KING KRULE, KING KRULE!”, everyone shouts, as he finds his way back on-stage, like the school-boy leader that everyone, even the pupils at all the rival schools, loves.



You can’t really tell from the pictures but no one in East London moves like this.

Finally, Fat White Family take to the stage and prove why they have their name painted on the pub. If tonight is about breaking down barriers, then these fat whites are the ones with a diamond sledgehammer. Frontman, Lias Saudi, is in-and-out of the crowd, banging his head with a tambourine and leering at no one in particular, while audience members stand atop speakers and across the bar.

It’s fucking sweltering inside and half of the band take their shirts off.

This man destroyed the keyboard.

And they even had a guy who looked like he came from the other pub around the corner playing the trumpet.

The band play “Hot Wet Beef”, the most onomatopoeic song you’re ever likely to hear. The crowd surges forward once more, everyone inside the venue participating in a celebration of getting fucked up and not fucking about.

Outside, two people tell me that they arrived too late to enter the venue before capacity was filled. Instead, they climbed over some roofs and came in through the Fat White's kitchen. It might be bullshit bravado, but its what makes the Slide-In. The night isn't about media coverage (soz), buzz-band bookings, or making money. It's about an extended musical family, made up of audience and musicians, finding the best way to spend their Saturday night in a city that, in some parts, is increasingly becoming over-priced, faceless, and lacking in personality.

This sort of venue, the polar opposite to sanitised, is important. It allows complete immersion. All the supposed freedom of social-media savvy and post-internet mystique has created bands that tend to hide away in the green-room, afraid of revealing too much. On-stage they stand looking bored, moody, and above playing to a concreted-still crowd who act like they're above having fun.

But as someone tells me tonight, Slide-In is “about showing everyone that we’re the same”, that we’re all part of the Fat White extended family.

Follow Ryan on Twitter: *@RyanBassil*

All Photos by *David Richardson*

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